

RICHELIEU AS AN ECCLESIASTIC.

FEW of the world's great ones have been subjected to such contrary judgments as those passed on the character of the Minister of Louis XIII. In his own day the flattery and hatred he experienced were equally blind and equally interested; many declared that he was the visible hand of Providence exalting France, while many others saw in him only an intriguer, a debauchee, and the evil genius of Europe. He was an ecclesiastic as well as a statesman; and in its criticism of churchmen the world readily verifies that saying which La-fontaine applied to the generality of its judgments. It pays but little attention to favorable truth, but eagerly credits any disparaging lie:

“L’homme est de glace aux vérités,
Il est de feu pour le mensonge.”

But upon whose authority do they rely who decry the private character of Richelieu? Chiefly on that of Henri de Loménie, Comte de Brienne, a writer who was not born at the time of the supposed events he narrates, who adduces no proofs whatever, and who, remarks the most painstaking of all Richelieu's modern critics, probably wrote his anecdotes in the prison of St. Lazare, in which his other insane ebullitions had caused him to be

immured.* Paul de Gondi, Cardinal de Retz, the Jansenistic coadjutor of Paris, is also brought forward; but the historical authority of this too famous "Frondeur" must be regarded as *nil*. In his "Mémoires," observes Sainte-Beuve, "where he speaks so candidly of himself, he continually uses such expressions as 'theatre' and 'comedy;' he regards everything simply as a play; and frequently, when speaking of the principal personages with whom he has to deal, he treats them exactly as a stage-manager would his actors. . . . He openly presents himself as an able *impressario*, arranging his work. . . . There are some passages in his 'Mémoires' where he seems to try to rival Molière rather than to combat Mazarin."† In Book I. he tells us that when made coadjutor to his uncle, he "ceased to frequent the pit, and went on the stage." When this work—which so many regard as an arsenal of weapons against Richelieu and his policy—was read by the poet J. B. Rousseau, he declared that it was "a salmagundi of good and bad, written sometimes well and sometimes miserably and very tedious. . . . I am astonished when I see a priest, an Archbishop, a Cardinal, a gentleman, a man of mature age, describing himself, as he does, as a duellist, a concubinary, and, what is worse, a deliberate hypocrite,—one who,

* Avenel: "Lettres, Instructions Diplomatiques, et Papiers d'Etat., du Cardinal de Richelieu;" p. xcvii. Paris, 1853.

† "Causeries du Lundi," vol. v.

during a retreat made in the seminary, took a resolution to be wicked before God and good before the world." In 1675 the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, in his "Maximes," said of De Retz: "His imagination, rather than his memory, supplies him with facts." Mme. de Sévigné, writing to her daughter concerning her correspondence with De Retz, said: "If anything foolish drops from your pen, he will be as much charmed as if it were serious." One or two exquisite morsels of this famous authority will illustrate his honesty: "Scruples and greatness have always been incompatible." "The crime of usurping a crown is so grand that it may pass for a virtue." Speaking of his conspiracy against the life of Richelieu (1636), he said: "The crime appeared to me to be consecrated by grand examples, and justified and honored by great risks." Truly did De Retz say of himself (B. I.) that he possessed "*l'âme peut-être la moins ecclésiastique qui fût dans l'univers.*" And let us not forget that this precious intriguer was a youthful abbé at the time, and that it is very unlikely that such secrets would have been confided to him during the lifetime of Richelieu; while if he knew of them only after the great Minister's death, the escapades in question could not have been so "notorious" as Voltaire would have us believe. Again, De Retz himself tells us that Richelieu preserved appearances—"Il avait assez de religion pour le monde."

Griffet, in his refutation of Voltaire's reasons for denying the authenticity of Richelieu's "Political Testament" (addressed to Louis XIII., and a monumental proof of the Cardinal's sincerity and wisdom), speaks of authentic records which detail the complaints concerning Richelieu often made by Louis XIII. to his confessor, F. Caussin.* The King blamed the Cardinal for prodigality and love of display, and was scandalized because his Eminence had procured from the Holy See a dispensation from the recitation of the Office; but not a word did his Majesty drop in derogation from the moral character of his Minister. Griffet quotes the "Mémoires" of the contemporary Montchal, Archbishop of Toulouse, who says that Richelieu "asked the Holy See for a Brief authorizing him to prosecute some dissolute bishops." Now, is it likely that the Cardinal would have so acted if his own guilt was "notorious?" And it is to be noted that Montchal shows great hostility to Richelieu; nevertheless, he fails to remark any such inconsistency. Voltaire affected to disbelieve in the authenticity of Richelieu's magnificent "Political Testament" to Louis XIII., because of its eloquent exhortations to virtue, "ostensibly" written by one who was "notoriously" delinquent;† and, notwithstanding this assertion,

* "Traité des différentes sortes de preuves qui servent à établir la vérité de l'Histoire." Liege, 1770.

† "Doutes nouveaux sur le testament attribué au Card. de Richelieu, et Arbitrage entre M. Voltaire et M. de Fonce-magne."

the Sage of Ferney says elsewhere* that our Cardinal's errors were "hidden weaknesses, which, in spite of all the care taken to cover them, show the littleness of greatness." We are, therefore, justified in concluding that Richelieu was not an immoral man. But we should like to draw the attention of the reader to a point which is seldom or never noticed—his character as a bishop.

Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu was born in Paris on September 9, 1585. Like nearly all persons whose mature age showed them to be truly great, his childhood exhibited no precocity; he was an ordinarily gifted boy. His first lessons were received, under the eyes of his mother, from the Prior of St. Florent de Saumur; and at the age of twelve he was sent to the College of Navarre, then one of the most famous in Paris. Having completed the ordinary course, he entered the "Academy," or military school. Avenel speculates as to the future of young Richelieu had he followed the

* "Histoire Universelle," vol. iv, p. 89.—The "Political Testament," one of the most solid instructions ever addressed to royalty, was drawn up by Richelieu in duplicate,—one copy going to his Majesty, the other to the Cardinal's niece, the Duchess d'Aiguillon, who, dying in 1675, left it to her confidante, Mme. du Vigean. It was published in 1688, went through many editions, and finally, in 1749, Voltaire attacked its authenticity in a dissertation subjoined—why, he alone knew—to his tragedy of "Sémiramis." He afterward republished this dissertation, "Des Mensonges Imprimés," in his "Essai sur l'Histoire Générale." Of the fifteen objections of which it consists, the one noticed above is probably the strongest; but all were triumphantly refuted by Foncemagne in

career for which he seemed destined. "He admired the military profession, and in certain circumstances he bore arms; he always superintended the direction of the army, its organization, its commissariat, etc. Frequently he laid aside the red cassock and donned the surcoat of the soldier; often he commanded in person; and we constantly find, in his papers, plans of battles and of fortifications designed by him. In councils of war his opinion often prevailed over that of experienced generals,—not because of any deference to his rank, but because of the conviction that his perceptions were just and his judgment solid."*

However, the young cadet left the Academy when eighteen years of age, and entered the theological schools of the Sorbonne. In 1606 Henry IV. named him for the bishopric of Luçon, although he was then only a deacon; "and since the said Du Plessis," wrote the King to d'Halin-court, his ambassador to the Holy See, "has not yet reached the age required by the canons, and since I am quite sure that his merit and ability supply this defect, you will beg his Holiness to grant the necessary dis-

1750. The latest author of note to treat of the "Political Testament" was La Bruyère, and he declared that "the man who performed such wonders (as Richelieu did) either never wrote at all, or he must have written this document." Montesquieu agreed with La Bruyère. In fine, this work will bear comparison with the similar ones composed by Fénelon and Bossuet for the guidance of their royal pupils.

* "La Jeunesse de Richelieu," in the "Revue des Quest. Hist.," 1869, vol. vi, p. 164.

pensation; for the said Du Plessis is in every way capable of serving the Church of God.”* The royal request was granted, and the young abbé was consecrated at Rome on April 17, 1607, and immediately returned to the Sorbonne to take his degrees. His assiduity in study had told on his health, and he was unable to make the journey to his diocese until December, 1608. Received as was customary by the chapter and magistracy, he alluded to the Huguenots of Luçon in these words: “Many there are who differ with us in belief; I trust that we shall all be united in affection.” And while ever firm in insisting on the rights of Holy Mother Church, his entire career at Luçon showed him the defender of those of Protestants;† although, as he was once forced to lament to a Huguenot friend, his sentiments were seldom reciprocated.

The diocese of Luçon was one of the poorest in France, and it is interesting to read Richelieu’s own description of some of his privations. *Noblesse oblige*, and the new prelate, a member of one of the first families in France, was expected to make an appropriate entry into his episcopal city. But he had no carriage, and it would have been in-

* Berger de Xivrey, “Lettres de Henri IV.,” vol. vii, p. 53.

† Cardinal Richelieu’s impartiality was especially manifested in his letters to Pontchartrain, secretary of state for Protestant affairs, guaranteeing the fidelity of the famous ministers du Plessy-Mornay and Chamier.

decorous to use a hired one; he therefore borrowed an equipage from a friend. On arriving at the episcopal palace, he found it uninhabitable and almost beyond repair, and he was compelled to hire apartments and buy all necessary furniture. Even the vestments of his pontifical office were wanting, and he thought himself fortunate, after a time, in procuring them in two colors. "Certainly," he wrote to a friend, "this is the most wretched bishopric in France; but, then, you know what kind of man the Bishop is." Richelieu could rely on little or no revenue in a diocese poor at all times, and then impoverished by war; and his own means were small, for he was a younger son. He therefore, as he said, was as poor as a monk, though without any vow of poverty; and on one occasion he was compelled by need to sell a valuable tapestry, a family heirloom. But, despite his small resources, he was a father to the poor, and did all he could to relieve their necessities.

Scarcely had he settled down in his new home when he made an episcopal visitation of the whole diocese; and he wrote to the Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, one of the most zealous bishops of the time, that he found "ecclesiastical discipline and authority everywhere weakened." To remedy the evil he called on the Capuchins (whom the famous Friar Joseph, the future "Grey Cardinal," was then exciting to renewed zeal) for missions; and he immediately established, with his own money, a new seminary, saying to its president that "no

act of his life had afforded him so much pleasure.” The first establishment, after the mother-house, possessed by the famous Oratorians founded by De-Bérulle, was given them in his diocese by Richelieu, and he justly prided himself on this fact in his “*Mémoires*.” When a parish became vacant, he invariably conferred it by *concursum*; but if, as was often the case, some powerful laic held the right of presentation, he insisted on a proper nomination. A certain Madame de Sainte-Croix having presented an unworthy candidate, he wrote to her: “I beg you to properly regard my fulfillment of duty when I refuse to entrust to this person the care of souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. By making another selection, you will also set a good example to others who enjoy the right of presentation.”

Work was always a passion with Richelieu, and, as the documents published by Avenel prove, when he was not occupied in the public affairs of his diocese, he was engaged in the direction of souls, in settling quarrels and preventing duels, in consoling the afflicted, and in study. Those who have never regarded him in any other light than that of a courtier may smile at the idea of Richelieu the student, and yet the future Minister’s studious habits were well known to his compeers. The famous Gabriel de l’Aubespine (Albaspinæus), Bishop of Orleans, certainly a competent judge,*

* De l’Aubespine was, according to “*Gallia Christiana*,” “*vir totius antiquitatis ecclesiasticæ peritissimus*.”

wrote to him on one occasion: "I have always counted much on your talent for ecclesiastical and spiritual matters; and now that you study so uninterruptingly, my estimation is increased, and I feel that you would not take such pains if you were not meditating some great design."

Even the illustrious theologian, Cardinal Duperron, admired the zeal of the Bishop of Luçon. In a letter written to Richelieu in 1610, when the prelate was but twenty-five years of age, a mutual friend said: "The Cardinal seizes every occasion to manifest his esteem for you. A certain person having praised you as eminent among young prelates, his Eminence declared that you ought not be mentioned among young prelates, for the oldest might well yield you precedence; and, for his part, he wished to set the example." Praise from Sir Hubert is praise indeed.

During his seven years' charge at Luçon, Richelieu made several trips to Paris; but on all these occasions he kept his episcopal position ever in mind, and frequently he preached in the principal pulpits of the capital. Aubery, who drew his information from the family of Richelieu, says that the King and Queen often attended these sermons, and that "they nearly always declared that no preacher ever made more impression on their hearts." The sermons of Cardinal Richelieu have not come down to us, but we must suppose that, whatever may have been his merits as a poet and playwright, they were good ones. He certainly

possessed, remarks a judicious critic,* the chief requisites of a fine preacher—force of logic, elevation of thought, and energy of expression.

The assiduity displayed by Richelieu in his studies while Bishop of Luçon was the more admirable because much of the time left him by the cares of his diocese had to be given to an extensive correspondence with many Roman cardinals and with the Papal Nuncio at Paris. Again—and this fact is worthy of note by those who believe him to have been a debauchee,—from his twenty-third year until his death in 1642, Richelieu was nearly always in physical pain. The first letter (1605) published by Avenel shows him in a painful convalescence after a long illness; and so on through the entire series we find him generally a victim to bodily suffering; his last attack continued more than a year.

Richelieu resigned his diocese in 1616 to become Prime Minister of France; and he himself, toward the close of his life, well epitomized his later career when he said to the King: “I promised your Majesty that I would use all my ability, and all the power you would give me, to crush the Huguenot party, to lay low the pride of the nobles, to force all your subjects to do their duty, and to cause foreign nations to properly respect your Majesty’s name; and to effect these ends I insisted that I

* Barthélemy, “Caractère de Richelieu,”

should have your entire confidence.”* Concerning this better known portion of the life of Richelieu, we would merely remark that few French historians have avoided either blind hatred or blind praise in treating of it; and foreigners, especially Englishmen and Germans, can not allude to it with equanimity; for, as Malherbe said in 1627, “the space between the Rhine and the Pyrenees appeared to Richelieu as a field too small for the lilies of France; he wanted them to wave on both shores of the Mediterranean, and wished their odor to be wafted even to the farthest Orient.”

From the “*Mémoires*” of Richelieu, published in the collection of Petitot (Series II., vol. x), Paris, 1823, we take the following particulars of the Cardinal’s daily life while Minister: He retired at eleven o’clock, and, having slept three or four hours, called for his dispatches, and then wrote or dictated the replies. At six he slept again, and at eight arose. After prayers his secretaries came for instructions; then he received the Ministers of State until eleven. At midday he heard Mass, celebrated by Friar Joseph. Then he took a short walk, giving audience to special and important parties. Then he lunched—fourteen covers being laid at his own table, thirty for invited guests at another, and a larger number at a third for his pages and the officers of his household. After lunch he conversed for a couple of hours with his

* “*Testament Politique.*”

familiars and with literary men, and the remainder of the day he worked at affairs of state. In the early evening he took a walk, meanwhile again giving audiences. The evening hours were passed with music, reading, or general talk, as the Cardinal thought that sleep was better wooed by previous conversation of a character neither sad nor rollicking. He seldom said Mass, but he confessed every week, receiving Holy Communion from his chaplain.

We may not dwell on the great Cardinal's career as statesman, but we close our article with a picture of his final hours as man.* When it became evident that Richelieu had but a short time to live, the King paid him a farewell visit, and was thus addressed by the dying man: "Sire, in taking farewell of your Majesty I have the consolation of knowing that I leave your kingdom in a more glorious condition, and with a greater reputation than it ever hitherto enjoyed. All your enemies are humiliated. Only one reward for all my services do I ask from your Majesty, and that is your good-will and protection for my nephews; and I give them my blessing only on condition that they are ever your faithful subjects." He

* "Récit de ce qui s'est passé un peu avant la mort de M. le Cardinal de Richelieu, arrivée le jeudi, 4 Dec., 1642, sur le midi" (Bibl. Nat. MSS. Fonds Dupuy, vol. DXC, fol. 298, recto); Griffet, "Histoire de Louis XIII.," vol. III, p. 576; Lettre d'Henri Arnauld, Abbé de Saint-Nicolas, au président Barillon, Dec. 6, 1642 (Bibl. Nat. Fonds Français, vol. XX, DCXXXV); cited by Barthélemy, *loc. cit.*

then conjured his physician to tell him frankly how long he might expect to live, and hearing that in twenty-four hours he would be dead or well, he demanded Extreme Unction. When the parish priest of Saint-Eustache, approaching with the holy oils, remarked that his high ecclesiastical rank dispensed him from answering the customary questions, Richelieu insisted on being treated "like an ordinary Christian." The priest then recited the principal articles of faith, and asked him if he believed in them all. "Absolutely," he replied; "and would that I had a thousand lives to give for the faith and the Church!"—"Do you forgive all your enemies?" asked the priest. "With all my heart," he answered; "and I call God to witness that I have ever intended only the good of religion and of the State." Being requested to pray to God for his recovery, he protested: "God forbid! I pray only to do his will." In a few hours the King heard of his bereavement, and exclaimed: "The enemies of France will not profit by the death of Richelieu. I shall go on with all he has begun."